

Gaston Caperton
PRESIDENT

October 18, 2005

Ms. Susan A. Gendron
Commissioner
Maine Department of Education
23 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0023

Dear Commissioner Gendron:

Congratulations to you and the state of Maine for electing to use the SAT as part of the state's accountability assessments. I commend you for your strong commitment to increasing college readiness and success among all of Maine's students, as reflected in the decision to include a college admission component as part of the high school assessments. Please let us know how we can support the successful administration of the SAT in a manner that best meets your needs and goals.

As you know, the introduction of significant changes to the SAT, beginning with the March 2005 administration, has more closely aligned the SAT with widely accepted curriculum and pedagogical standards. The SAT is a national college admission test, but can be used for other purposes if evidence of its validity is produced. For example, many colleges and universities currently use the SAT for placement in college courses, and evidence for the validity of that use has been confirmed. Similar evidence has been produced to support the use of the SAT as a state-wide high school accountability measure:

- Content validity evidence is needed to demonstrate that the content of the SAT adequately aligns with a state's content standards. The SAT does not necessarily need items to measure each and every content standard, just as current state tests will not meet such a requirement. Instead, evidence demonstrating alignment between a sufficiently broad range of standards and appropriate depth of knowledge on these standards is needed. A study conducted for the state of Maine has been completed that demonstrates alignment with state standards. The state will be required to conduct a second independent study prior to use of the SAT to meet federal guidelines. Based on these studies, the state must ultimately determine whether the SAT and or any other test adequately aligns to state standards.
- The U.S. Department of Education will then review evidence of alignment between state standards and assessment coverage (in this case the SAT). The assessment plan submitted by the state must address the evidence gathered to

support statements about alignment. If there are substantial gaps in coverage or depth of knowledge, the state may decide to augment the SAT with additional test items and tasks for students.

- Additional evidence of the validity of the SAT for accountability includes evidence that the SAT correlates to high school achievement. There are hundreds of studies that demonstrate that SAT scores are correlated to high school grades, high school rank, high school GPA, and the rigor of high school courses completed.

The decision to use a college admissions test for high school accountability is not unique to the state of Maine. For the past four years, Illinois and Colorado have each used the ACT as part of their math, reading, and writing high school accountability tests. Recently, Michigan issued an RFP that required a college admissions test to partially replace its state test. In addition, other states have noted their interest in exploring this option.

Testing nearly 100 percent of Maine's eleventh graders will address the often-expressed concern about using a test to compare schools or districts. In other states, students self-select whether or not to take the SAT. In some states, as many as 92 percent of students take the SAT, and in other states, as few as five percent take the SAT. In the majority of states, a range of 30-65 percent of students takes the SAT. It is not fair to compare schools or states that have substantially different participation rates, because typically high-performing students are more likely to take the SAT. This limitation is removed when a state requires all (or nearly all) students to take the SAT—as will be the case in Maine. If this condition and other requirements are met, cross-school comparisons, as well as comparisons of growth over years (within a school), are likely to be in compliance with professional and technical testing standards for purposes of comparing scores among schools.

I want to acknowledge that there are differences between most state high school assessments and the SAT, of which you are no doubt aware, and which do not preclude the use of the SAT as an appropriate accountability measure:

- The SAT covers a more limited range of content because it focuses on measuring high skills and abilities. It is not as likely to have as many items that measure basic knowledge; however, when students demonstrate mastery of higher-ability constructs, it is logical to assume they have mastered the entry-level skills that may not be included on an SAT. For example, if students demonstrate an ability to multiply compound fractions on a test (e.g., $3\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{3}$), it is generally safe to assume that most of those students would be able to multiply one and two digit integers (3×4) without necessarily including the lower-level items on a test. Because it measures student knowledge of higher-level skills, it is an appropriate assessment to determine students' readiness for success in work and college.

- The SAT has national norms, meaning scores can be compared to students across the state, the region, and the nation. The SAT is administered nine times per year to more than 2.5 million students, and has a large group of testing experts with extensive experience developing, equating and scoring each test. Unlike state tests, all forms are strictly comparable, meaning one form is not easier or more difficult than a form the following year. There are many more quality control procedures with the SAT than with other tests, and there is strong continuity among staff that ensures the SAT meets the highest technical standards. Also unlike some state tests, the SAT has never had an equating or reporting error that has required canceling scores.
- Multiple forms of the SAT are available, ensuring the highest security standards as well as multiple opportunities and forms for testing.
- Scores are available 16 days following administration, thereby providing students and schools quick feedback.
- Because the SAT is used in college admissions, students are motivated to perform as well as they can on the test; parents and educators consider the results important, and everyone takes the test seriously.
- Testing experts have compared national admissions tests like the SAT to state tests and concluded the former is better managed, more rigorous, and a better choice for quality in state testing programs.

Commissioner Gendron, my colleagues and I are eager to work with you and your staff to ensure an efficient and high-quality administration of the SAT beginning next spring. Please let me know how we can support this important initiative, which will connect more Maine students to college success.

Warm regards.

Sincerely,



Gaston Caperton

cc: Arthur Doyle
Vice President
College Board
New England Regional Office